

Candidate Questionnaire on Housing Issues

2022



Aric Putnam

City/Town: St. Cloud

Legislative District: SD14

Party: DFL

Candidate responses in italics.

1. In July 2021, a [national poll](#) found that 68% of the public believes that elected officials are not paying enough attention to the rising cost of housing and ensuring everyone can afford a place to live. **What do you believe is the role of government in ensuring everyone has a place to call home?**

Government's responsibility is simple: promote accessibility to safe, affordable housing. Safe, affordable housing is essential for our community's economic growth and our neighbors' health.

2. Nearly all counties in Minnesota (92%) are not able to provide sufficient shelter or temporary housing to those who are homeless. **What will you do to end homelessness?**

The first step is to tackle the public and personal issues that make people homeless in the first place. Some people become homeless because of mental health struggles or rising costs of healthcare. For those who already are homeless we need solutions that address both acute and chronic circumstances: shelters need wraparound services to help people get back on their feet, and we need to develop pathways to home ownership.

3. Emergency rental assistance keeps people stably housed, as we saw with federal pandemic-related funding. Historically, nonpayment of rent is the most common reason landlords evict their tenants. During times of financial crisis, families without access to financial resources may be displaced, evicted, or even become homeless. **What will you do to prevent evictions?**

The federal program during COVID saved many from eviction. I spoke with a number of landlords during the pandemic who were grateful for that assistance because they didn't want to evict anyone. It's better for both the tenant and the landlord not to have to engage in eviction proceedings. So, I'd like to see greater dialogue between landlords and tenants and resources dedicated to facilitating this dialogue and helping people stay in their homes.

4. Minnesota's housing crisis disproportionately harms families of color, especially Black and Indigenous households. Minnesota is one of the worst states in the nation for racial disparities in homeownership. Additionally, 58 percent of Black renters are paying more than they can afford on housing costs. **What meaningful steps will you take to eliminate racial disparities in housing?**

Historically, there are real concerns about discrimination from landlords and lenders. This history contributes to our current struggles. One meaningful step that I have already taken is working with BIPOC workforce development to increase capital in communities of color. But we also need to take steps to curb predatory lending that traditionally has targeted populations of color.

5. There are approximately 170,000 renter households in the state that earn less than \$31,200 per year. But rental assistance is only available to one out of every four income-qualifying households. Even though more than 100,000 lowest income households need homes, the state only supports the production of 100 homes each year for these families. **What will you do to support the housing needs of those at the lowest income level in Minnesota?**

The first step is expanding rental assistance. But we also need to facilitate building wealth through equity. So, we also need programs to assist with closing costs for starter homes.

6. Energy efficiency improvements in multifamily buildings and weatherizing single family homes improve indoor air quality, eliminate drafts, and protect residents from extreme cold and heat—delivering health benefits and lower health care costs. **What strategies do you support to improve housing conditions and reduce utility costs?**

The mantra of some is that regulations are why housing costs so much. I think that perspective is shortsided and oversimple, at best. People of all means deserve safe and efficient housing. We shouldn't use lack of affordability as an excuse to create substandard housing for people in need. The government has a compelling interest in making all housing more energy efficient. I'd like to see an extension of grants to make housing more efficient, especially older homes often occupied by seniors on fixed incomes.

7. Minnesota's home values are increasing rapidly, constraining low- and middle-income families from achieving affordable homeownership, including more than 64,000 households of color. **What steps will you take to increase opportunities for renters to purchase homes, condos, or cooperative ownership models?**

For one, I'm a fan of exploring and expanding community land trust opportunities. In addition, we also need to create greater education in financial literacy, need based grants to pay closing costs, and flexible financing options for people from all backgrounds.

8. Including the recommendations of the community when developing policies and programs is a best practice for effective and lasting solutions. **How will you include those most impacted by housing needs in developing and implementing housing solutions?**

I've been the most locally engaged legislator in my community by a wide margin. I've held 31 town halls in two years and hold office hours every Friday during session. Legislators who are lazy and don't show up have no awareness of the real problems in the community but also fail to understand the tremendous capacity we have within our communities to fix some of these problems.